

THURSDAY, JUNE 3, 1886

BRITISH FUNGI

Hymenomycetes Britannici—British Fungi (Hymenomycetes). By Rev. John Stevenson, Author of "Mycologia Scotica." Vol. I. Agaricus—Bolbitius. 8vo, pp. 372, with Cuts. (Edinburgh: William Blackwood and Sons, 1886.)

A QUARTER of a century ago, the number of persons in this country who made any pretence to study the fungi might have been counted on the fingers, and almost on the fingers of one hand. At that time Berkeley's "Outlines of British Fungology" had just appeared, but with it came no visible evidence of an increased number of students. An unfortunate desire to limit the volume to a definite size and price acted injuriously upon its contents. Half the book was a mere list of names without descriptions, and in the other half the descriptions were reduced to short diagnoses, quite insufficient except for those who were somewhat expert in the study. The young student struggling to get some knowledge of these obscure plants had no alternative but to fall back on the supplementary volume of Hooker's "English Flora" for the information he needed, oftentimes with much disappointment. Hence it is not surprising that only a few had the courage to persevere in a study for which there was no adequate text-book. It was not until 1871 that Cooke's "Hand-book of British Fungi" supplied what was required, and imparted a stimulus to the pursuit of that section of British botany, which has gradually increased in force, until at the expiration of another fifteen years, the "Hand-book" is out of print, and out of date, with a greatly augmented body of students looking anxiously for a new edition, or an entirely new work.

At this crisis, and under these circumstances, the work now before us has made its appearance, opportunely, and it is to be hoped satisfactorily, to fill a vacant place. No apology is offered, and none is required, where there is no rivalry, and a manifest necessity has been created by the flux of time. If the new work fulfils all the conditions of such a "Hand-book" of mycology as the student would require, there is a good and valid case in its favour. It must be conceded that although his previous "Mycologia Scotica" was little more than a localised catalogue, there was every reason to believe that the Rev. John Stevenson would bring practical experience and literary ability to his task, and acquit himself well in the production of a more elaborate work. In the result his friends have no reason to be disappointed. He has laboured conscientiously, and although in some things we do not agree with him, has accomplished a useful task.

It is hinted in the preface, although not clearly stated, what is the character of the book, namely, that it is practically a translation of Fries's "Monographia" in so far as the British species are concerned. There is no doubt that this was the best course to adopt, because there can be no two opinions of the value of Fries's observations, and the book in which they are written is very rare, and beyond the reach of the ordinary student. Still it would

have been better not to have left this point in suspense, since a long detailed description which can be attributed without reservation to Fries is of infinitely more value than the most careful compilation would be. Unfortunately, any one who opens the book to consult it for the first time will at once conclude that the descriptions are the original production of the author, whose name appears on the title-page. We do not for a moment imagine that there was any desire to appropriate wholesale and take credit for the product of another man's brains, but unfortunately that is done sometimes in scientific books, and an honest author should be above suspicion.

Of the type, paper, and general appearance of the work, including the woodcuts by Mr. Worthington Smith, we have nothing to say except in strong commendation. But we cannot help quoting one sentence from the preface, which at least is original—"The tendency in recent years has been to multiply species unnecessarily, and ultimately many so-called species must disappear. The pruning-knife must be unsparingly used; but this must be the work of a Congress of Cryptogamic Botanists, not of individual authors." This quotation is made without intention of dissenting from it, but as a prelude to a statement of the fact that in the present volume two sub-genera and about fifty species (good, bad, or indifferent) which have been recorded as British, some on the authority of the Rev. M. J. Berkeley, and many of them figured, are entirely excluded without comment or apology. Was this "the work of a Congress of Cryptogamic Botanists or of an individual author?"

Some writers, and compilers, of the present day exercise a questionable originality in the correction, or alteration, of the orthography of generic names which have been in use for, perhaps, half a century. No useful purpose is served, except the gratification of personal vanity, and the multiplication of synonymy. We note, on p. 304, an instance of this kind, where *Psalliota* is written *Psaliota*. Without inquiring which is most accurate, or most elegant, surely its uniform use by Fries, in the previous form, since 1821, should have been sufficient to protect it from the "pruning-knife," and given it some title to usage in perpetuity. To such manipulators of names we would commend the following sentence from De Candolle's *Commentary on the Laws of Botanical Nomenclature*:—"In these kinds of questions, it must be borne in mind that the fixity of names is of superior importance."

We observe also two or three instances in which the orthography of specific names has undergone a change, but as it is just possible that these may be referred to typographical errors, and not to any intentional mutilation, we will accord the author the benefit of the doubt.

Some apology is made in the preface for a departure in the present work from the ordinary method of giving first a short diagnosis of the species, and afterwards a detailed description. "I am aware," it says, "that the departure from this method will touch existing prejudice; but it seems desirable to avoid repetition, to the extent of one-third, or one-half, in the account of each species, and thereby to secure space for fuller description. Moreover the *diagnosis* is not lost. From the arrangement which is adopted in printing, the student, if he is a student at

all, can at a glance pick it out for himself." We confess that we are not conscious ourselves of any prejudice which this arrangement touches inconveniently, since the diagnoses, by themselves, can be obtained in another form.

This first volume extends to the end of the genus *Bolbitius*; a second volume is proposed to complete the work, embracing all the British Hymenomycetes. Thus far we have descriptions of 822 species, corresponding to 485 which were included in the "Hand-book of British Fungi" in 1871, and 383 in Berkeley's "Outlines" in 1860, whilst all the European species included in Fries's "Hymenomycetes" up to the same point was 1271. Hence it would appear that two-thirds of the species enumerated by Fries as European have been found in the British Isles. This may not be absolutely accurate, since there are some included in the present volume which are not to be found in Fries, but the proportion is small and will not much affect the ratio. It is an interesting fact that the number of British species has been nearly doubled in fifteen years, which at least must be taken to indicate a larger number of observers and increased activity, for which there was doubtless some good and sufficient cause. Although coloured figures of upwards of 700 out of the 822 species have been published in this country since 1881, that would scarcely have been an appreciable factor in the result.

Criticisms of particular species would prove of little interest to any but practical mycologists, and therefore we forbear. In these times, when authority is held to have such slender claims, and independence of opinion is esteemed more highly than respect for the convictions of the old masters, it is a great consolation to encounter such an earnest and faithful disciple of the good old mycologist of Upsal as we meet with in the author of the book before us. Yet, notwithstanding this good trait, he has evidently a weak place in his human nature, without the tact to conceal it, and this is to be regretted, since rancour--like young chickens--comes home to roost.

M. C. C.

A MEDICAL INDEX-CATALOGUE

Index Catalogue of the Library of the Surgeon-General's Office, United States Army. Vol. VI. Heastic Insfeldt. (Washington: Government Printing-Office, 1885.)

AMONGST the vast and rapidly-increasing mass of scientific literature it is a singular satisfaction to meet with a first-rate work such as this "Index Catalogue," which holds out good promise of being a clue to some parts at least of what is far too large for any single grasp. And if in any department of science it is more important than in another to trace generalisations to their foundations upon observations, and to have the facts before one, it is in medicine, which still contains so many dogmas whose foundations are not beyond attack, and so many observations in want of an adequate theory to explain them. In giving a clue to medical knowledge this "Index Catalogue" is in one respect at least, and in one very important respect, unique among its class; for under subject-headings such as, in this volume, hernia, hooping-cough, hydrophobia, hip-joint, hospitals, hygiene, insanity, &c., it gives a list not only of all the books and

pamphlets in the library dealing with them, but also a list of the full titles of all the articles on them in all the periodical literature that it possesses, *Journals, Transactions, Reports, Reviews, Bulletins, &c.*; and when we reflect that the list of such periodicals taken in by the Surgeon-General's Office amounts now to at least 3005 (of which a very considerable proportion are weekly or monthly publications), such a careful classification of their separate articles would seem to be beyond all hope. However, the unexampled energy of Mr. J. S. Billings and his able assistants, which gives us every month the *Index Medicus*, has proved equal to this gigantic task, which it would have seemed to most men mere foolishness to attempt. The advantage to the student is immense; for in such periodical literature, by modern fashion, a great number of important facts in medicine lie buried, and there would hardly be a chance of finding them without some such help as is given us here. For though the literature of science is far less at present in bulk than the literature of some other subjects, most notably divinity, yet the literature of natural science, even in one of its many subdivisions, such as medicine, is paralysing in its profusion. To take as an instance the literature of a disease which, though just at present it is the fashion to talk much about it, is yet so rare that many doctors with considerable experience have never seen it, viz. hydrophobia, we find catalogued here not only 368 books dealing with it specially, but also the full titles of more than 1900 signed articles, not in the general but the medical press of the European languages, that have to do with it as well; and yet that is not a fifth part of what is catalogued under "Cholera" in Vol. III., and not a tenth of what is catalogued under "Fever" in Vol. V. The subdivision and arrangement of the masses of information so gathered together is admirable, and that, for subjects so difficult to deal with as hospitals and hygiene, which occur in this volume, is not a little to be proud of, and one that any student will appreciate. To the accuracy of every entry it would be absurd to pretend to testify on our own investigation, but frequent use of the five preceding volumes and some testing of this sixth volume leave us in little doubt that a very high standard was previously reached, and will be found to be maintained, and of course that is one of the points of cardinal importance in what is practically a dictionary of reference.

The Washington Library, or, as we should say more accurately, the "Library of the Surgeon-General's Office, United States Army," is one of the two or three largest collections of medical books in the world, and its growth has been astonishingly rapid. It was begun in 1830, and, after the first thirty years, in 1860, it contained only 350 volumes. To what size, at the end of the next thirty years, in 1890, we may see it grow we hardly venture to speculate; but in 1883 it stood at about 60,000 books and 66,000 pamphlets, and took in more than 2600 periodicals; and yet a careful critic last year estimated that for every hundred medical books that were in both the Washington Library and the British Museum there were also another hundred in each that were not in the other. If that be true, it would not astonish us to hear that for every hundred held in common there were fifty or more in the Bibliothèque Nationale at Paris, which were not to be